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ABSTRACT

The central activity of literary criticism, the understanding of literature, is related to the process of establishing a context for the works of literature being studied. Choosing not to discuss the factual elements of literary criticism, the author clarifies and concentrates on the "lower" and "upper" limits of criticism. While the "lower" limit essentially deals with a defense of freedom of speech and thought, the "upper" level is noted to be the ultimate function of criticism in that it leads to inner possession of literature as an imaginative force. The understanding of literature, equated with having literary experience, therefore, leads the author to discuss why literature cannot be taught. While criticism must begin with "visible" orientation toward its object, it arrives at its true goal when rendered "invisible" through self-realization of the literary experience. Some remarks on humanism, philology, "new criticism", personal taste as criticism, estheticism (critical dandyism), and evaluative criticism are also included. (RL)

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Criticism, Visible and Invisible

NORTHROP FRYE

THERE IS A DISTINCTION, certainly as old as Plato and possibly as old as the human mind, between two levels of understanding. I say levels, because one is nearly always regarded as superior to the other, whether in kind or in degree. Plato calls them, in his discussion of the divided line in the *Republic*, the level of *nous* and the level of *dianoia*, knowledge of things and knowledge about things. Knowledge about things preserves the split between subject and object which is the first fact in ordinary consciousness. "I" learn "that": what I learn is an objective body of facts set over against me and essentially unrelated to me. Knowledge of things, on the other hand, implies some kind of identification or essential unity of subject and object. What is learned and the mind of the learner become interdependent, indivisible parts of one thing.

Three principles are involved in this conception. First, learning about things is the necessary and indispensable prelude to the knowledge of things: confrontation is the only possible beginning of identity. Second, knowledge about things is the limit of teaching. Knowledge of things cannot be taught: for one thing, the possibility that there is some principle of identity that can link the knower and the known in some essential relation is indemonstrable. It can only be accepted, whether unconsciously as an axiom or deliberately as an act of faith. He who knows on the upper-level knows that he knows, as a fact of his experience, but he cannot impart this knowledge directly. Third, *nous* is (or is usually considered to be) the same knowledge as *dianoia:* it is the relation between knower and known that is different. The difference is that something conceptual has become existential: this is the basis of the traditional contrast between knowledge and wisdom.

This distinction is of great importance in religion: Maritain's *Degrees of Knowledge* is one of many attempts to distinguish a lower comprehension from a higher apprehension in religious experience. When St. Thomas Aquinas remarked on his deathbed that all his work seemed to him so much straw, he did not mean that his books were worthless, but that he himself was passing from the *dianoia* to the *nous* of what he had been writing about. I mention the religious parallel only to emphasize a principle which runs through all education: that what Plato calls *nous* is attainable only through something analogous to faith, which implies habit or consistent will, the necessary persistence in pursuing the goals of the faith.

I am dealing here, however, only with the application of the principle of two levels of knowledge to the ordinary learning process. Here the clearest illustration is that of a manual skill. In beginning to learn a skill like driving a car, a conscious mind comes in contact with an alien and emotionally disturbing object. When the skill is learned, the object ceases to be objective and becomes an extension of the personality, and the learning process has moved from the conscious mind to something that we call unconscious, subconscious, instinctive, or whatever best expresses to us the idea of unmediated unity. We think of this subconscious, usually, as more withdrawn, less turned outward to the world, than the consciousness: yet it is far less solipsistic. It is the nervous novice who is the solipsist: it is the trained driver, with

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a hidden skill that he cannot directly impart to others, who is in the community of the turnpike highway, such as it is.

Literature presents the same distinction. There is the *dianoia* of literature, or criticism, which constitutes the whole of what can be directly taught and learned about literature. I have explained elsewhere that it is impossible to teach or learn literature: what one teaches and learns is criticism. We do not regard this area of direct teaching and learning as an end but as a means to another end. A person who is absorbed wholly by knowledge about something is what we ordinarily mean by a pedant. Beyond this is the experience of literature itself, and the goal of this is something that we call vaguely the cultivated man, the person for whom literature is a possession, a possession that cannot be directly transmitted, and yet not private, for it belongs in a community. Nothing that we can teach a student is an acceptable substitute for the faith that a higher kind of contact with literature is possible, much less for the persistence in that faith which we call the love of reading. Even here there is the possibility of pedantry: literature is an essential part of the cultivated life, but not the whole of it, nor is the form of the cultivated life itself a literary form.

The great strength of humanism, as a conception of teaching literature, was that it accepted certain classics or models in literature, but directed its attention beyond the study of them to the possession of them, and insisted on their relevance to civilized or cultivated life. We spoke of pedantry, and there was undoubtedly much pedantry in humanism, especially at the level of elementary teaching, but not enough to destroy its effectiveness. Browning's grammarian was not a pedant, because he settled *hoti's* business and based *oun* in the light of a blindingly clear vision of a community of knowledge. The act of faith in literary experience which humanism defended was closely associated with a more specific faith in the greatness of certain Greek and Latin classics. The classics were great, certainly, and produced an astonishingly fertile progeny in the vernaculars. But the conception of literature involved tended to be an aristocratic one, and had the limitations of aristocracy built in to it. It saw literature as a hierarchy of comparative greatness, the summit of which provided the standards for the critics.

In the philologists of the nineteenth century, dealing with the vernaculars themselves, one sometimes detects a late humanistic pedantry which takes the form of critical arrogance. All too often the philologists, one feels, form an initiated clique, with literary standards and models derived (at several removes) from the "great" poets, which are then applied to the "lesser" ones. Old-fashioned books on English literature which touch on "lesser" poets, such as Skelton and Wyatt in the early sixteenth century, maintain an attitude toward them of slightly injured condescension. Criticism of this sort had to be superseded by a democratizing of literary experience, not merely to do justice to underrated poets, but to revise the whole attitude to literature in which a poet could be judged by standards derived from another poet, however much "greater." Every writer must be examined on his own terms, to see what kind of literary experience he can supply that no one else can supply in quite the same way. The objection "But Skelton isn't as great a poet as Milton" may not be without truth, but it is without critical point. Literary experience is far more flexible and varied than it was a century ago, but hierarchical standards still linger, and the *subjection* of the critic to the uniqueness of the work being criticized is still not a wholly accepted axiom. Also, the relevance to criticism of what used to be regarded as sub-literary material, primi-

tive myths and the like, is still resisted in many quarters.

All teaching of literature, which is literary *dianoia* or criticism, must point beyond itself, and cannot get to where it is pointing. The revolution in the teaching of English associated with the phrase "new criticism" began by challenging the tendency (less a tendency of teachers, perhaps, than of examination-haunted students) to accept knowledge about literature as a substitute for literary experience. The new critics set the object of literary experience directly in front of the student and insisted that he grapple with it and not try to find its meaning or his understanding of it in the introduction and footnotes. So far, so good. No serious teaching of literature can ever put the object of literary experience in any other position. But new criticism was criticism too: it developed its own techniques of talking about the work, and providing another critical counterpart of the work to read instead. No method of criticism, as such, can avoid doing this. What criticism can do, to point beyond itself, is to try to undermine the student's sense of the ultimate objectivity of the literary work. That, I fear, is not a very intelligible sentence, but the idea it expresses is unfamiliar. The student is confronted by an alien structure of imagination, set over against him, strange in its conventions and often in its values, a mysterious and stylized "verbal icon." It is not to remain so: it must become possessed by and identified with the student. Criticism cannot make this act of possession for the student; what it can do is to weaken those tendencies within criticism that keep the literary work objective and separated. Criticism, in order to point beyond itself, must be more than merely aware of its limitations: it needs to be actively iconoclastic about itself.

The metaphor of "taste" expresses a real truth in criticism, but no metaphor is without pitfalls. The sense of taste is a contact sense: the major arts are based on the senses of distance, and it is easy to think of critical taste as a sublimation, the critic being an astral gourmet and literature itself being, as Plato said of rhetoric, a kind of disembodied cookery. This gastronomic metaphor is frequently employed by writers, for instance at the opening of *Tom Jones*, though when recognized as a metaphor it is usually only a joke. It suggests that the literary work is presented for enjoyment and evaluation, like a wine. The conception of taste is a popular one because it confers great social prestige on the critic. The man of taste is by definition a gentleman, and a critic who has a particular hankering to be a gentleman is bound to attach a good deal of importance to his taste. A generation ago the early essays of Eliot owed much of their influence and popularity to their cavalierism, their suggestion that the social affinities of good poetry were closer to the landed gentry than to the Hebrew prophets. Taste leads to a specific judgment: the metaphor of the critic as "judge" is parallel to the metaphor of taste, and the assumption underlying such criticism is usually that the test of one's critical ability is a value-judgment on the literary work.

If this is true, the critic's contribution to literature, however gentlemanly, seems a curiously futile one, the futility being most obvious with negative judgments. Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Middleton Murry, F. R. Leavis, are only a few of the eminent critics who have abused Milton. Milton's greatness as a poet is unaffected by this: as far as the central fact of his importance in literature is concerned, these eminent critics might as well have said nothing at all. A journal interested in satire recently quoted a critic as saying that satire must have a moral norm, and that Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* was a failure because no character in it represented a moral norm. The question was referred to me, and I said, somewhat irritably, that of course a moral

norm was essential to satire, but that it was the reader and not the satirist who was responsible for supplying it. My real objection however was to the critical procedure involved in the "X is a failure because" formula. No critical principle can possibly follow the "because" which is of any importance at all compared to the fact of *Jonathan Wild's* position in the history of satire and in eighteenth-century English culture. The fact is a fact about literature, and, as I have tried to show elsewhere, nothing can follow "because" except some kind of pseudo-critical moral anxiety. Thus: "*King Lear* is a failure because it is indecorous to represent a king on the stage as insane." We recognize this statement to be nonsense, because we are no longer burdened with the particular social anxiety it refers to, but all such anxieties are equally without content. Matthew Arnold decided that "Empedocles on Etna" was a failure because its situation was one "in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." These phrases would exactly describe, for instance, Eliot's "Prufrock," one of the most penetrating poems of our time, or a good deal of Arnold's contemporary, Baudelaire. We cannot question Arnold's sincerity in excluding his poem from his 1853 volume, but all he demonstrated by excluding it was his own anxious fear of irony.

The attitude that we may call critical dandyism, where the operative conceptions are vogue words of approval or the reverse, like "interesting" or "dreary," is an extreme but logical form of evaluating criticism, where the critic's real subject is his own social position. Such criticism belongs to the wrong side of Kierkegaard's "either-or" dialectic: it is an attitude for which the work of art remains permanently a detached object of contemplation, to be admired because the critic enjoys it or blamed because he does not. Kierkegaard himself was so impressed by the prevalence of this attitude in the arts that he called it the aesthetic attitude, and tended to identify the arts with it. We do not escape from the limitations of the attitude by transposing its judgments from an aesthetic into a moral key. F. R. Leavis has always commanded a good deal of often reluctant respect because of the moral intensity he brings to his criticism, and because of his refusal to make unreal separations between moral and aesthetic values. Reading through the recent reprint of *Scrutiny*, one feels at first that this deep concern for literature, whether the individual judgments are right or wrong, is the real key to literary experience, and the real introduction that criticism can make to it. But as one goes on one has the feeling that this concern, which is there and is a very real virtue, gets deflected at some crucial point, and is prevented from fully emerging out of the shadow-battles of anxieties. Perhaps what the point is is indicated by such comments of Leavis himself as "the poem is a determinate thing: it is *there*," and, "unappreciated, the poem isn't 'there.'" An insistence on the "thereness" or separation of critic and literary work forces one, for all one's concern, to go on playing the same "aesthetic" game. The paradox is that the "aesthetic" attitude is not a genuinely critical one at all, but social: concern makes the social reference more impersonal, but does not remove it.

Evaluating criticism is mainly effective as criticism only when its valuations are favorable. Thus Ezra Pound, in the middle of his *Guide to Kulchur*, expresses some disinterested admiration for the lyrical elegies of Thomas Hardy, and the effect, in that book, is as though a garrulous drunk had suddenly sobered up, focused his eyes, and begun to talk sense. But, of course, if my argument suggests that everything which has acquired some

reputation in literature should be placed "beyond criticism," or that histories of literature should be as bland and official as possible, I should merely be intensifying the attitude I am attacking, turning the verbal icon into a verbal idol. My point is a very different one, and it begins with the fact that the work of literature is "beyond criticism" now: criticism can do nothing but lead into it.

There are two contexts in which a work of literature is potential, an internal context and an external one. Internally, the writer has a potential theme and tries to actualize it in what he writes. Externally, the literary work, actualized in itself, becomes a potential experience for student, critic, or reader. A "bad" poem or novel is one in which, so the critic feels, a potential literary experience has not been actualized. Such a judgment implies a consensus: the critic speaks for all critics, even if he happens to be wrong. But an actualized work of literature may still fail to become an actualized experience for its reader. The judgment here implies withdrawal from a consensus: however many critics may like this, I don't. The first type of judgment belongs primarily to the critical reaction to contemporary literature, reviewing and the like, where a variety of new authors are struggling to establish their authority. The second type belongs primarily to the tactics of critical pressure groups that attempt to redistribute the traditional valuations of the writers of the past in order to display certain new writers, usually including themselves, to better advantage. There is no genuinely critical reason for "revaluation." Both activities correspond in the sexual life to what Freud calls the "polymorphous perverse," the preliminaries of contact with the object. Judicial criticism, or reviewing, is necessarily incomplete: it can never free itself from historical variables, such as the direct appeal of certain in-group conventions to the sophisticated critic. The kind of criticism that is expressed by the term "insight," the noticing of things in the literary work of particular relevance to one's own experience, is perhaps the nearest that criticism can get to demonstrating the value of what it is dealing with. Insight criticism of this kind, however, is a form of divination, an extension of the principle of *sortes Virgilianae*: it is essentially random both in invention and in communication.

In short, all methods of criticism and teaching are bad if they encourage the persisting separation of student and literary work: all methods are good if they try to overcome it. The tendency to persistent separation is the result of shifting the critical attention from the object of literary experience to something else, usually something in the critic's mind, and this deprives criticism of content. I know that I have said this before, but the same issues keep turning up every year. This year the issue was raised by Professor Rowse's book on Shakespeare. The questions usually asked about Shakespeare's sonnets, such as who was W. H. and the like, have nothing to do with Shakespeare's sonnets or with literary criticism, and have only got attached to criticism because, owing to Shakespeare's portentous reputation, critics have acquired an impertinent itch to know more about his private life than they need to know. It seemed to Professor Rowse that such questions were properly the concern of a historian, and he was quite right. True, he had no new facts about the sonnets and added nothing to our knowledge of this alleged subject, but his principle was sound. But Professor Rowse went further. It occurred to him that perhaps literary criticism was not a genuine intellectual discipline at all, and that there could be no issues connected with it that could not be better dealt with by someone who did belong to a genuine discipline, such as history. One of his sentences, for instance, begins: "A real writer understands better than a mere critic." Literary criticism ought

to be profoundly grateful to Professor Rowse for writing so bad a book: it practically proves that writing a good book on Shakespeare is a task for a mere critic. Still, the fact that a responsible scholar in a related field could assume, in 1964, that literary criticism was a parasitic pseudo-subject with no facts to build with and no concepts to think with, deserves to be noted.

I do not believe, ultimately, in a plurality of critical methods, though I can see a division of labor in critical operations. I do not believe that there are different "schools" of criticism today, attached to different and irreconcilable metaphysical assumptions: the notion seems to me to reflect nothing but the confusion in critical theory. In particular, the notion that I belong to a school or have invented a school of mythical or archetypal criticism reflects nothing but confusion about me. I make this personal comment with some hesitation, in view of the great generosity with which my books have been received, but everyone who is understood by anybody is misunderstood by somebody. It is true that I call the elements of literary structure myths, because they are myths; it is true that I call the elements of imagery archetypes, because I want a word which suggests something that changes its context but not its essence. James Beattie, in *The Minstrel,* says of the poet's activity:

> From Nature's beauties, variously compared
> And variously combined, he learns to frame
> Those forms of bright perfection

and adds a footnote to the last phrase: "General ideas of excellence, the immediate archetypes of sublime imitation, both in painting and in poetry." It was natural for an eighteenth-century poet to think of poetic images as reflecting "general ideas of excellence"; it is natural for a twentieth-century critic to think of them as reflecting the same images in other poems. But I think of the term as indigenous to criticism, not as transferred from Neoplatonic philosophy or Jungian psychology. However, I would not fight for a word, and I hold to no "method" of criticism beyond assuming that the structure and imagery of literature are central considerations of criticism. Nor, I think, does my practical criticism illustrate the use of a patented critical method of my own, different in kind from the approaches of other critics.

The end of criticism and teaching, in any case, is not an aesthetic but an ethical and participating end: for it, ultimately, works of literature are not things to be contemplated but powers to be absorbed. This completes the paradox of which the first half has already been given. The "aesthetic" attitude, persisted in, loses its connection with literature as an art and becomes socially or morally anxious: to treat literature seriously as a social and moral force is to pass into the genuine experience of it. The advantage of using established classics in teaching, the literary works that have proved their effectiveness, is that one can skip preliminary stages and clear everything out of the way except understanding, which is the only road to possession. At the same time it is easy for understanding to become an end in itself too. The established classics are, for the most part, historically removed from us, and to approach them as new works involves a certain historical astigmatism: but to consider them as historical documents only is again to separate student and literary work. In teaching manual skills, such as car-driving, an examination can test the skill on the higher level; but an examination in English literature cannot pass beyond the level of theoretical knowledge. We may guess the quality of a student's literary experience from the quality of his writing, but there is no assured way of telling from the outside the difference between a student

who knows literature and a student who merely knows about it.

Thus the teaching of literature, an activity of criticism which attempts to cast its bread on the waters without knowing when or how or by whom it will be picked up, is involved in paradox and ambiguity. The object of literary experience must be placed directly in front of the student, and he should be urged to respond to it and accept no substitutes as the end of his understanding. Yet it does not matter a tinker's curse what a student thinks and feels about literature until he can think and feel, which is not until he passes the stage of stock response. And although the cruder forms of stock response can be identified and the student released from them, there are subtler forms that are too circular to be easily refuted. There is, for instance, critical narcissism, or assuming that a writer's "real" meaning is the critic's own attitude (or the opposite of it, if the reaction is negative). There is no "real" meaning in literature, nothing to be "got out of it" or abstracted from the total experience; yet all criticism seems to be concerned with approaching such a meaning. There is no way out of these ambiguities: criticism is a phoenix preoccupied with constructing its own funeral pyre, without any guarantee that a bigger and better phoenix will manifest itself as a result.

A large part of criticism is concerned with commentary, and a major work of literature has a vast amount of commentary attached to it. With writers of the size of Shakespeare and Milton, such a body of work is a proper and necessary part of our cultural heritage; and so it may be with, say, Melville or Henry James or Joyce or T. S. Eliot. The existence of a large amount of commentary on a writer is a testimony to the sense of the importance of that writer among critics. As the first critic in *The Pooh Perplex* says, on the opening page of the book: "Our ideal in English studies is to amass as much commentary as possible upon the literary work, so as to let the world know how deeply we respect it." An important critical principle is concealed in this remark. It is an illusion that only great literature can be commented on, and that the existence of such commentary proves or demonstrates its greatness. It is a writer's merits that make the criticism on him rewarding, as a rule, but it is not his merits that make it possible. The techniques of criticism can be turned loose on anything whatever. If this were not so, a clever parody like *The Pooh Perplex* could hardly make its point. Hence a mere display of critical dexterity or ingenuity, even as an act of devotion, is not enough: criticism, to be useful both to literature and to the public, needs to contain some sense of the progressive or the systematic, some feeling that irrevocable forward steps in understanding are being taken. We notice that all the contributors to *The Pooh Perplex* claim to be supplying the one essential thing needed to provide this sense of progress, though of course none of them does. Thus the piling up of commentary around the major writers of literature may in itself simply be another way of barricading those writers from us.

Yeats tells us that what fascinates us is the most difficult among things not impossible. Literary criticism is not in so simple a position. Teaching literature is impossible; that is why it is difficult. Yet it must be tried, tried constantly and indefatigably, and placed at the center of the whole educational process, for at every level the understanding of words is as urgent and crucial a necessity as it is on its lowest level of learning to read and write. Whatever is educational is also therapeutic. The therapeutic power of the arts has been intermittently recognized, especially in music since David played his harp before Saul, but the fact that literature is essential to the mental health of society seldom enters our speculations about it. But if I am to take seriously my own principle that works of

literature are not so much things to be studied as powers to be possessed, I need to face the implications of that principle.

I wish all teachers of English, at every level, could feel that they were concerned with the whole of a student's verbal, or in fact imaginative, experience, not merely with the small part of it that is conventionally called literary. The incessant verbal bombardment that students get from conversation, advertising, the mass media, or even such verbal games as Scrabble or cross-word puzzles, is addressed to the same part of the mind that literature addresses, and it does far more to mold their literary imagination than poetry or fiction. It often happens that new developments in literature meet with resistance merely because they bring to life conventions that the critics had decided were sub-literary. Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* met with resistance of this kind, and in our day teachers and critics who think literature should be a matter of direct feeling and are prejudiced against the verbal puzzle find that their students, unlike themselves, are living in the age of *Finnegans Wake*. There is a real truth, for all of what has been said above, in the belief that the critic is deeply concerned with evaluation, and with separating the good from the bad in literature. But I would modify this belief in three ways. First, as just said, the area of literature should not be restricted to the conventionally literary, but expanded to the entire area of verbal experience. Hence the evaluating activity should not be concerned solely with civil wars in the conventionally literary field. Second, the distinction of good and bad is not a simple opposing of the conventionally literary to the conventionally sub-literary, a matter of demonstrating the superiority of Henry James to Mickey Spillane. On the contrary, it seems to me that an important and neglected aspect of literary teaching is to illustrate the affinities in structure and imagery between the "best" and the "worst" of what every young person reads or listens to.

Third, if I am right in saying that literature is a power to be possessed, and not a body of objects to be studied, then the difference between good and bad is not something inherent in literary works themselves, but the difference between two ways of using literary experience. The belief that good and bad can be determined as inherent qualities is the belief that inspires censorship, and the attempt to establish grades and hierarchies in literature itself, to distinguish what is canonical from what is apocryphal, is really an "aesthetic" form of censorship. Milton remarked in *Areopagitica* that a wise man would make a better use of an idle pamphlet than a fool would of Holy Scripture, and this, I take it, is an application of the gospel principle that man is defiled not by what goes into him but by what comes out of him. The question of censorship takes us back to the metaphor of taste by a different road, for censorship is apparently based on an analogy between mental and physical nourishment, what is censorable being inherently poisonous. But there is something all wrong with this analogy: it has often been pointed out that the censor himself never admits to being adversely affected by what he reads. We need to approach the problem that censorship fails to solve in another way.

In primitive societies art is closely bound up with magic: the creative impulse is attached to a less disinterested hope that its products may affect the external world in one's favor. Drawing pictures of animals is part of a design to catch them; songs about bad weather are partly charms to ensure good weather. The magical attachments of primitive art, though they may have stimulated the creative impulse, also come to hamper it, and as society develops they wear off or become isolated in special ritual com-

partments. Many works of art, including Shakespeare's *Tempest*, remind us that the imaginative powers are released by the renunciation of magic. In the next stage of civilization the magical or natural attachment is replaced by a social one. Literature expresses the preoccupations of the society that produced it, and it is pressed into service to illustrate other social values, religious or political. This means that it has an attachment to other verbal structures in religion or history or morals which is allegorical. Here too is something that both hampers and stimulates the creative impulse. Much of Dante's *Commedia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* is concerned with political and religious issues that we regard now as merely partisan or superstitious. The poems would never have been written without the desire to raise these issues, and as long as we are studying the poems the issues are relevant to our study. But when we pass from the study to the possession of the poems, a dialectical separation of a permanent imaginative structure from a mass of historical anxieties takes place. This is the critical principle that Shelley was attempting to formulate in his *Defence of Poetry*, and in fact the Romantic movement marks the beginning of a third stage in the attachments of the arts, and one that we are still in.

This third stage (to some extent "decadent," as the first one is primitive, though we should be careful not to get trapped by the word) is both social and magical, and is founded on the desire to make art act kinetically on other people, startling, shocking, or otherwise stimulating them into a response of heightened awareness. It belongs to an age in which kinetic verbal stimulus, in advertising, propaganda, and mass media, plays a large and increasing role in our verbal experience. Sometimes the arts try to make use of similar techniques, as the Italian Futurist movement did, but more frequently the attempt is to create a kind of counter-stimulus. In the various shocking, absurd, angry, and similar conventions in contemporary art one may recognize a strong kinetic motivation. Even in the succession of fashions there is something of this, for the succession of vogues and movements in the arts is part of the economy of waste. Most cultivated people realize that they should overlook or ignore these attachments in responding to the imaginative product itself, and meet all such assaults on their sense of decorum with a tolerant aplomb that sometimes infuriates the artist still more. Here again, the attachment begins as a stimulus and may eventually become a hindrance, unless the artist is astute enough to detach himself at the point where the hindrance begins.

It is the critic's task, in every age, to fight for the autonomy of the arts, and never under any circumstances allow himself to be seduced into judging the arts, positively or negatively, by their attachments. The fact that, for instance, Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* is written in the convention of the psychological shocker does not make it either a good or a bad book, and the fashion for pop-art painting is neither good because painters ought to rediscover content nor bad because they ought not. But an essential part of the critic's strategy, to the extent that the critic is a teacher, is in leading his students to realize that in responding to art without attachments they are at the same time building up a resistance to kinetic stimulus themselves. Literary education is not doing the whole of its proper work unless it marshals the verbal imagination against the assaults of advertising and propaganda that try to bludgeon it into passivity. This is a battle that should be fought long before university, because university comes too late in a student's life to alter his mental habits more than superficially. I think of a public school teacher I know who got his grade eight students to analyze the rhetorical devices in a series of magazine advertisements. The effect was so shat-

tering that he thought at first he must be working with too young an age group: children who were contemptuous of Santa Claus and the stork were still not ready to discover that advertising was no more factual than the stories they told their parents. Eventually, however, he realized that he was right, and that he had uncovered a deeper level of literary response than literature as such can ordinarily reach at that age.

The direct response to a verbal kinetic stimulus persists into adult life, and is, of course, what makes the propaganda of totalitarian states effective for their own people. Such response is not an inability to distinguish rhetorical from factual statement, but a will to unite them. Even though a Communist, for example, understands the difference between what is said and the political necessity of saying it, he has been conditioned to associate rhetoric and fact when they are produced in a certain area of authority, not to separate them. In the democracies we are not trained in this way, but we are continually being persuaded to fall into the habit, by pressure groups trying to establish the same kind of authority, and by certain types of entertainment in which the kinetic stimulus is erotic. I recently saw a documentary movie of the rock-and-roll singer Paul Anka. The reporter pried one of the squealing little sexballs out of the audience and asked her what she found so ecstatic about listening to Anka. She said, still in a daze: "He's so *sincere*." The will to unite rhetorical and direct address is very clear here.

The central activity of criticism, which is the understanding of literature, is essentially one of establishing a context for the works of literature being studied. This means relating them to other things: to their context in the writer's life, in the writer's time, in the history of literature, and above all in the total structure of literature itself, or what I call the order of words. Relation to context accounts for nearly the whole of the factual basis of criticism, the aspect of it that can progress through being verified or refuted by later criticism. This central activity itself has a further context, a lower and an upper limit, with which I have been mainly concerned in this paper. On the lower limit is criticism militant, a therapeutic activity of evaluation, or separating the good from the bad, in which good and bad are not two kinds of literature, but, respectively, the active and the passive approaches to verbal experience. This kind of criticism is essentially the defence of those aspects of civilization loosely described as freedom of speech and freedom of thought. On the higher limit is criticism triumphant, the inner possession of literature as an imaginative force to which all study of literature leads, and which is criticism at once glorified and invisible.

We remember the discussion in Joyce's *Portrait* in which the characteristics of beauty are said to be *integritas, consonantia,* and *claritas;* unity, harmony, and radiance. Poet and critic alike struggle to unify and to relate; the critic, in particular, struggles to demonstrate the unity of the work of literature he is studying and to relate it to its context in literature. There remains the peculiar *claritas* or intensity, which cannot be demonstrated in either literature or criticism, though all literature and criticism point toward it. No darkness can comprehend any light; no ignorance or indifference can ever see any *claritas* in literature itself or in the criticism that attempts to convey it, just as no saint in ordinary life wears a visible gold plate around his head. All poet or critic can do is to hope that somehow, somewhere, and for someone, the struggle to unify and to relate, because it is an honest struggle and not because of any success in what it does, may be touched with a radiance not its own.

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